



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

## **Hardin County Extension News Release**

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### **Be Prepared for Combine Fires during Harvest Season**

*Hardin County* – The combination of high temperatures and dry conditions are the perfect conditions for field fires and combine fires during harvest. Dry grasses, crop residues, and woodland debris along many of our farm fields provide fuel for field fires. Likewise, leaked fuel, cracked hydraulic hoses, heated bearings, overheated belts and chains can provide the ignition for equipment fires.

The combine is a critical piece of equipment for fall harvest. There are several precautions for protecting combines from fire this season. Work crews should take extra precautions to prevent fires from starting. Park a hot combine away from out-buildings. Keeping a combine out of barns, sheds, and away from other flammables is a common prevention strategy in case a hot spot ignites. Insurance claims can double when equipment fires are responsible for loss of farm structures.

Regular maintenance is priority. Check the machine daily for any overheated bearings or damage in the exhaust system. Keep the fittings greased. Maintain proper coolant and oil levels. Repair fuel or oil hoses, including fittings and metal lines if they appear to leak.

Keep dried plant material from accumulating on the equipment. Frequently blow dry chaff, leaves and other crop materials that have accumulated on the equipment with a portable leaf blower or air compressor. Be sure to inspect the engine compartment and other areas where chaff accumulates around bearings, belts, and other moving parts.

Maintain the electrical system. Pay attention to machine components that draw a heavy electrical load, such as starter motors and heating/cooling systems. Monitor circuits for any overloading, especially if fuses blow regularly. Keep wiring in good condition and replace frayed wiring or worn out connectors.

Refuel a cool engine whenever possible. Never refuel a combine with the engine running. It is recommended to turn off the engine and wait 15 minutes; this helps to reduce the risk of a spill volatilizing and igniting. Prevent static electricity while operating in a dry field. Use a ground chain attached to the combine frame to prevent static charges from igniting dry chaff and harvest residue, letting the chain drag on the ground while in the field.

Have equipment ready to fight field and combine fires. Have two fully charged fire extinguishers on the combine. In a combine, keep a 10-pound unit in the cab and a 20-pound unit mounted at ground level. Have one fully charged fire extinguisher in the tractor, grain cart, and pickup truck. ABC fire extinguishers are recommended on farm machinery. These extinguishers are good for fires at incipient phases – meaning at the first sign of smoke or a small flame.

Have a portable water tank and shovel on standby. A water tank at the edge of the field can help extinguish field fires. A shovel can be used to throw dirt over burning field residue. However, stay back if the fire takes off. When a fire appears, it is important to put worker protection before saving equipment. If in the combine cab, turn off the engine and exit the machine.

Call 911 before trying to extinguish the fire yourself. In many situations, first responders cannot arrive on the scene fast enough to extinguish a fire. Calling 911 puts professionals in action sooner than later. If the fire is in the cab, stand on the exterior platform and use the 10-pound fire extinguisher from the outside of the cab. If the fire is inside the equipment, use caution when opening the engine compartment or other hatches as small fires can flare with extra air. Stay a safe distance away from the fire as you use the 20-pound extinguisher.

Use water and a shovel on small field debris fires. These items can stop field fires from spreading. Have an emergency plan in place and be sure all employees know the plan. Combine fires happen fast – be sure to talk to employees (the hired and the “helper crews”) to know what to do if smoke or fire appears. The safety of the people always comes before the saving of equipment.

*Article written by Dee Jepsen, OSU Extension-Ag Safety and Health, edited by Mark Badertscher, OSU Extension-Hardin County.*